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Gabriel Ignacio Venegas

The Bruckner Challenge

In- and Outward Dialogues in The Third Symphony's Slow Movement(s)

Sine initio et sine fine, vere et semper idem et eodem modo se habens solus est Deus.¹

– Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*

El concepto de *texto definitivo* no corresponde sino a la religión o al cansancio.²

– Jorge Luis Borges, *Las versiones homéricas*

Introduction

Arguably more than with most other composers, the reception history of Anton Bruckner's music is complex and contentious. Since the composer's lifetime, doubts have persistently been cast over both his competence as a composer and the artistic merits of his music. A salient feature in this contentiousness is the controversy surrounding what scholars refer to, after Deryck Cooke, as the ›Bruckner problem‹.³ Two interrelated factors are central to this issue. On the one hand, although Bruckner's mature compositional output (i.e., from 1863 on) comprises only a relatively small number of large-scale pieces, these works have survived – due to Bruckner's penchant for reworking his own music – in a variety of realizations. On the other hand, throughout Bruckner's life and up to the advent of the *Neue Bruckner-Gesamtausgabe* in the 1950s, Bruckner's music was

1 »God alone is without beginning and without end, truly and always the same and in the same way« (translation mine).

2 »The concept of *definitive text* belongs but to religion or exhaustion« (translation mine).

3 Cooke 1969.

regularly performed and published in heavily edited (sometimes recomposed) versions prepared by his pupils and advocates.⁴ These two factors have combined to produce a *sui generis* corpus of texts, leading to Bruckner's symphonies being construed as boundaryless, multidimensional works that resist traditional notions of authenticity and authorship.

The idea of a ›Bruckner symphony‹ that has come to us is, then, that of a work that questions the concept of the self-contained composition. That being the case, the issue under inquiry should be less how to come up with a solution to an anomaly than how to embrace the challenge (i.e., the ›Bruckner challenge‹) to notions about music (e.g., ›authenticity‹, ›author‹, and ›genius‹) that have shaped the discourses and practices from which textual multiplicity in Bruckner's music has been tackled. If so, there seems to be space for a new approach to the ›Bruckner problem‹, one that moves away from the traditional argumentative boundaries and towards a reconfiguring of the epistemological frame of inquiry, and ultimately advancing an alternative interpretation.

As if questions of textual and ontological matters were not difficult enough, the reception history of Bruckner's music is full of other unsettled controversies. Chief among these is Bruckner's treatment of large-scale form. As Benjamin Korstvedt notes, »there is something sphinx-like about Bruckner's musical forms. They can seem neat and traditional at one moment, but at the next appear free and unconventional.«⁵ This multifaceted impression has not escaped the ears of commentators. Their remarks, however, have tended to overemphasize one side or the other, some critics judging his symphonic forms as puzzling to the point of formlessness,⁶ and others considering them excessively predictable⁷ and overly reliant on classical symphonic models.⁸ Paradoxically, for each claim that Bruckner is overdoes something, there is an opposing claim that he does not do enough of that same thing.

The challenges posed by Bruckner's treatment of form then seem also to require an analytical reattunement. A step in that direction is provided by Julian Horton, who understands Bruckner's forms as part of a dialectical interplay between tradition and innovation – a feature that Horton finds integral to the

4 See, e.g., the following editions: Franz Schalk's WAB 105, Ferdinand Löwe's WAB 109, and Robert Haas's WAB 102 and 108.

5 Korstvedt 2004, p. 170.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 170.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 172.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 171.

post-Beethovenian symphonic tradition. Nineteenth-century symphonic forms, writes Horton, »simultaneously acknowledge and supersede the Beethovenian model, whilst presenting the result as a synthetic whole that attempts to be more than the sum of its antithetical parts.«⁹ Along similar lines, James Hepokoski suggests three factors as fundamental to understanding the mid- and late-19th-century symphonic genre: 1) the emergence, during the 19th century, »of the academic recognition and honouring« of the Austro-German sonata construct; 2) a marked preoccupation with the idea of tradition – or as Hepokoski states, »the struggle over the presumed ownership of that tradition«; and 3) a compositional practice characterized by »*ad hoc* designs« and »individualized shapes«.¹⁰

Developing this characterization of the 19th-century field of symphonic production, Hepokoski has advanced a theory of ›sonata deformation‹ that allows for a more nuanced understanding of 19th-century formal procedures. At the core of this theory's hermeneutic framework is an emphasis on the play between tradition as a regulative principle and individuality as normative practice.

A sonata deformation is an individual work in dialogue primarily with sonata norms even though certain central features of the sonata-concept have been reshaped, exaggerated, marginalized or overridden altogether. What is presented on the musical surface of a composition (what one hears) may not be a sonata in any ›textbook‹ sense, and yet the work may still encourage, even demand, the application of one's knowledge of traditional sonata procedures as a rule for analysis and interpretation.¹¹

As can be implied from this quotation, central to Hepokoski's theory of deformation is a dialogical conception of form: the idea that a work's formal-expressive meaning arises from a dialogue between generic expectations and their individualized realizations.

One of the strengths of Hepokoski's deformation theory is its capacity to account for the highly individualized formal practices of 19th century composers, and in this sense, his theory provides valuable clues to the formal play in Bruckner's music. However, since Hepokoski's dialogic approach has no explicit concern with textual multiplicities, advancing a counterdiscourse to the ›Bruckner problem‹ from a dialogical perspective would require further development of some aspects of the approach. Thus, I propose conceiving formal-expressive meaning in Bruckner's symphonies as growing out of a ›two-dimensional‹ dia-

9 Horton 2004, p. 156.

10 Hepokoski 2002, pp. 424–425 and 447.

11 Ibid., p. 447. On the concept of ›deformation‹, see Hepokoski/Darcy 2006, p. 614.

logue. On the one hand, there would be the dialogue à la Hepokoski, in which the individual exemplar interacts with its implied genre. I characterize this dialogue as fundamentally public, insofar as it arises from the interplay between the individual exemplar and a larger established repertoire. Consequently, I designate this dialogic dimension as the ›outward dialogue‹. On the other hand, I suggest considering a second kind of dialogue, one among the various individualized realizations that comprise the multifaceted picture of a single Bruckner symphony. I characterize this second dialogic dimension as fundamentally private, insofar as its capacity to produce meaning is not contingent on the interaction of the individual exemplar with outside ›others‹, but instead with its many ›selves‹. Accordingly, I designate this dialogic dimension as the ›inward dialogue‹.

From a hermeneutic standpoint, the compound dialogic approach that I describe has the advantage of both accounting for Bruckner's formal idiosyncrasies and turning the ›Bruckner Problem‹ into a ›Bruckner Potential‹: it provides an analytical tool that clears the way for a more nuanced and sympathetic understanding of Bruckner's symphonic forms and their textual characteristics.

WAB 103/II: Texts

In order to lay out the basics of the above-mentioned two-dimensional dialogic approach, I would like to turn to the slow movement of Bruckner's Third Symphony (henceforth WAB 103/II). Let us begin by defining the textual corpus. For practical reasons, I will narrow the scope to extant texts directly associated with Bruckner himself that have played a central role in his music's reception history. (That is, I will focus on an idea of WAB 103/II formed out of its edited scores and extant manuscripts.)¹² Proceeding in this way, it is possible to trim the textual body of the slow movement into seven distinct states: five extant authorial realizations and two early published editions. Using formal type as a criterion,¹³ I have organized these texts under the three broader compositional stages shown in Example 1: 1) an early stage comprising the first three versions, that is, those

¹² The sounding texts produced during the movement's actual performances are indeed central in shaping (through live concerts and recordings) the listener's idea of the movement. The inclusion of these texts here, however, would unnecessarily complicate (and thus obscure) the presentation of the method. If desired, the scope of the proposed textual corpus can be expanded or reduced to accommodate individual cases (i.e., texts familiar to a given listener) without changing the underlying analytical method.

¹³ On Sonata Theory's five sonata-form types, see Hepokoski/Darcy 2006, pp. 343–345.

of 1873, 1874, and 1876 (henceforth 73v, 74v and 76v); 2) an intermediate or middle stage containing the 1877 version and the 1879 first published edition (henceforth 77v and 79e); and 3) a late stage comprising the 1889 version and the 1890 second published edition (henceforth 89v and 90e).

Composition Date	Version / Editor ^A	Sonata Type	Stage
February 24–May 24, 1873	1873 / Leopold Nowak ^B	Type 3 with <i>Vollendung</i>	Early
1874	1874 / William Carragan ^C		
1876	1876 / Leopold Nowak ^D		
October 1877	1877 / Leopold Nowak ^E	Type 2 with <i>Vollendung</i>	Middle
1878	1st published edition (1879) / T. Rättig (publisher) ^F		
February 17–22, 1889	1889 / Leopold Nowak ^G	<i>Outward dialogue</i> : Type 3 (truncated recapitulation) with Coda or/and <i>Inward dialogue</i> : aborted Type 3 (no recapitulation) with <i>Vollendung</i>	Late
1889–1890	2nd published edition (1890) / J. Schalk (editor), T. Rättig (publisher) ^H		

^A Unless otherwise noted, all versions are published by Musikwissenschaftlicher Verlag on behalf of the Internationalen Bruckner-Gesellschaft.

^B Edition based on the 1874 signed copy (Bayreuth, Nationalarchiv der Richard-Wagner-Stiftung, II Co 2) that Bruckner presented as a gift to Richard Wagner.

^C Unpublished edition based on the 1874 manuscript copy (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Mus. Hs. 6033) that Bruckner keep to himself, which contains autograph additions. On the 1874 version, see Carragan 2013.

^D Bruckner detached several pages from the extant autograph score of 76v (Vienna, Archiv der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, A173) and used them as part of the autograph score for 77v (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Mus. Hs. 19.475). For his edition of the 76v Nowak identified the exported pages and restored the 76v autograph score.

^E Edition based on the final form of the 1873–1878 autograph score (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Mus. Hs. 19.475).

^F Edition based on the *Stichvorlage* prepared by Bruckner and an unknown copyist (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Mus. Hs. 34.611).

^G Edition based on the *Stichvorlage* (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Mus. Hs. 6081) prepared by Bruckner for the second published edition.

^H Edition based on the *Stichvorlage* (see G), but including various changes made (possibly by Joseph Schalk) before the final printing.

Example 1: Textual sources, A. Bruckner’s WAB 103/II¹⁴

WAB 103/II: 89v and 90e (outward dialogue)

Among the different versions, those of the last stage are especially interesting in terms of their formal organization (see Examples 2 and 3). From the perspective of the movement’s outward dialogue, and following the terminology

¹⁴ Information in the first two columns of Example 1 (and its associated notes) is drawn from Röder 1997.

of Hepokoski and Darcy’s Sonata Theory,¹⁵ 89v and 90e may be parsed into four large-scale formal spaces: 1) a four-key two-part exposition;¹⁶ 2) an S-based development (half rotation);¹⁷ 3) a truncated recapitulation (aborted before moving beyond P-theme space, consequently consisting of P-based modules only);¹⁸ and 4) a 23-measure coda.

Part I Part II

1 17 23 29 41 73 86

P TR S^{1.1} S^{1.2} C

(I-^bVI-IV^b-I) V: HC II¹: PAC

Plagal Prolongation MC¹ EEC

I V ^bIII II¹ = (V/V)

Example 2: A. Bruckner’s WAB 103/II (89v and 90e), Exposition

Exposition (mm. 1–96)		Development (mm. 96–153)	Truncated Recapitulation (mm. 154–199)	Coda (mm. 200–222)
First Part (P/TR) (mm. 1–40)	Second Part (S/C) (mm. 41–96) II:PAC EEC	Half Rotation (S/C)	First Part (P) No S = No ESC (Premature Sonata Failure)	(P)

Example 3: A. Bruckner’s WAB 103/II (89v and 90e): overall outward form

From a structural-expressive viewpoint, the truncated recapitulation constitutes an unexpected turn in the piece’s dramatic trajectory. As Hepokoski and Darcy explain, in a sonata form, »the recapitulation delivers the *telos* of the entire sonata – the point of ›essential structural closure‹ (ESC), the goal toward which the entire sonata-trajectory has been aimed. This is normally the first satisfactory I:PAC within the recapitulation’s part 2 that proceeds onward to different material.«¹⁹ Accordingly, the absence of recapitulatory S- and C-spaces in 89v and 90e thwarts the attainment of ESC, thus producing a deformation

15 On Sonata Theory’s terminology and standard formal abbreviations, see Hepokoski/Darcy 2006, pp. xxv – xxviii. A brief overview of the basics of the Sonata-Theory approach is found in *ibid.*, pp. 14–22.

16 On the two-part exposition, see *ibid.*, pp 23–24.

17 On developmental rotation, see *ibid.*, pp. 205–207. On developmental half rotations, see *ibid.*, p. 217. On the rotational principle in general, see *ibid.*, pp. 611–614.

18 On recapitulations with suppressed S/C space, see *ibid.*, pp. 247–249, and Caplin 1998, p. 216.

19 Hepokoski/Darcy 2006, p. 232.

referred to by Hepokoski and Darcy as ›sonata failure‹: a compositional strategy characterized by the failure to secure the ESC.²⁰ Interestingly, the lack of the recapitulation's part 2 in 89v and 90e rules out not only attaining ESC but even attempting it. In so doing, this compositional strategy conveys a distinctive dramatic effect: the musical persona, so to speak, prematurely realizes that he or she is either unable to deliver or uninterested in accomplishing a successful trajectory as set by the undergoing generic conditions, and thus decides to pursue a different path (one entailing a structural deformation). To distinguish this specific dramatic trajectory from other instances of sonata failure, I characterize the sonata failure with no recapitulatory S-space as an instance of ›premature failure‹, which – inasmuch as the conditions of sonata failure can be said to have been prematurely accepted or foreshadowed – entails, both expressively and structurally, a collapsing trajectory.

I would like to defer further discussion on the outward form of 89v and 90e to the last section of this essay, and instead explore an alternative interpretation that shifts the focus from the ›outwardness‹ of the specific version to the ›inwardness‹ of the movement's multiple versions. Because 89v and 90e constitute just one slice of the movement's inward identity, it seems appropriate to begin this interpretative shift by tracing the movement's compositional history.

WAB 103/II: 73v

As shown in Example 4, the earliest version of the movement (i.e., 73v) is in dialogue with a Type-3 sonata.²¹ Here, however, a peculiar formal twist problematizes (deforms) what otherwise would have been a crystal-clear dialogue: following the end of the recapitulation is an appended formal space encompassing an extended iteration of the P-theme followed by a coda. As this appended section is a feature in nearly all of Bruckner's post-1872 symphonic slow movements,²² a brief digression to consider its characteristic features and formal function is in order.

At its most characteristic, this formal idiom comprises a two-stage process. The first stage is the above-mentioned third and final extended presentation of

20 On Hepokoski and Darcy's concept of ›failure‹, see *ibid.*, pp. 177–179 and 245–249.

21 On the generic layout of Type-3 sonatas, see Figure 2.1b in *ibid.*, p. 17. For a brief overview of the various sonata types specified by Sonata Theory, see *ibid.*, pp. 344–345.

22 The main exception being the Sixth Symphony.

the P-theme following a failed recapitulation. This P-based zone is distinguished from those in the exposition and the recapitulation by its steady process of goal-directed textural, dynamic, and harmonic intensifications (*Steigerungen*). Dramatically speaking, the apex of this process – often a *fortissimo* 6/4 chord – is central to the formal concept of Bruckner’s slow-movements: it projects – in spite of its paragenetic status²³ and unstable quality²⁴ – a sense of fulfillment that somewhat artificially saves the movement’s trajectory from the directionless fate set by the preceding failed recapitulation.²⁵

Exposition (mm. 1–88)		Development (mm. 89–128)	Recapitulation (mm. 129–224)		Vollendung (mm. 225–278)	
First Part (P/TR) (mm. 1–32)	Second Part (S/C) (mm. 33–88)	Half Rotation (S/C)	First Part (P/TR) (mm. 129–160)	Second Part (S) (mm. 161–224)	P ^{voll} (P) (mm. 225–256)	Coda (P) (mm. 257–278)

Example 4: A. Bruckner’s WAB 103/II (73v): overall form

The second stage, the coda proper, is a shorter segment with a recessive character that compensates for the monumental, energy-gaining profile of the first stage. Although locally it is a distinctive unit, the coda combines with the preceding iteration of the P-theme into a single unit at the movement’s highest level of functional organization (i.e., that of the Exposition, Development, and Recapitulation). It then seems necessary to devise a distinctive analytical label for this large-scale formal space. For this purpose, I borrow the German term *Vollendung* (completion). Furthermore, in order to differentiate the instantiation of the P-theme in the first part of the *Vollendung* from those in the Exposition and Recapitulation, I add the abbreviation P^{voll} to Hepokoski and Darcy’s Sonata-Theory standard terminology. This abbreviation stands for the P-based zone of the *Vollendung* (*Vollendungshauptthema*), and it is aimed at capturing the feel of a concluding, cathartic P-theme.²⁶

23 On paragenetic spaces, see *ibid.*, pp. 281–305.

24 See, e.g., WAB 104, 105, WAB 107, and WAB 108 (first version), in which the Adagio’s apex is a V6/4 chord in C major. Interestingly, C major is alien to the home key of the Adagios of WAB 103 (E-flat major), WAB 105 (D minor), WAB 107 (C-sharp minor), and WAB 108 (D-flat major), which suggests that a pitch-specific association (C major) is also central to the formal content and expressive import of the P-based *Steigerung*.

25 See the exposition’s II:PAC in m. 78 (the essential expositional closure or EEC), and then compare it with measures 161–224, in which the S-theme fails to articulate a successful ESC (essential structural closure). On EEC and ESC, see Hepokoski/Darcy 2006, pp. 120–124 and 232–233.

26 For a paradigmatic example of the Brucknerian *Vollendung*, see the slow movement of the Seventh Symphony (P^{voll}= measures 157–193; Coda= measures 193–219).

An important rhetorical aspect of the P^{Voll} is its dialogical engagement with the large-scale architectural principle of rotation, which, as Hepokoski and Darcy explain, »underpins a generous diversity of forms that may be distinguished from one another on more surface-oriented levels.«²⁷ It is precisely this phenomenon that accounts for the prevailing analytical tradition of associating Bruckner's slow movements with circular-oriented forms such as 5-part rondo and song forms. Although some of these forms (e.g., Type-4 sonata-rondo mixtures²⁸) are part of the dialogic environment of many of Bruckner's slow movements, I see Type-3 sonata form as the fundamental dialogue at stake in WAB 103/II. Accordingly, my analytical interpretations here emphasize the Type-3 sonata's generic expectations.²⁹

WAB 103/II: 77v & 79e, and 89v & 90e (inward dialogue)

To resume tracing the movement's compositional history, we may skip 74v and 76v, and move instead to the middle compositional stage. As Example 5 illustrates, although 74v and 76v contain several modifications, these do not alter the overall plan of 73v. A completely different situation, however, is found in 77v and 79e, in which the modifications do involve formal reworking: Bruckner makes a huge cut from the beginning of the recapitulation (deleting the P-theme, TR, and the beginning of the S-theme), which drastically shifts the sonata from Type 3 to Type 2.³⁰ In light of these cuts, the modifications of the final stage represent a further step along the same path. As shown at the bottom of Example 5, Bruckner essentially eliminates what in 77v and 79e functions as the

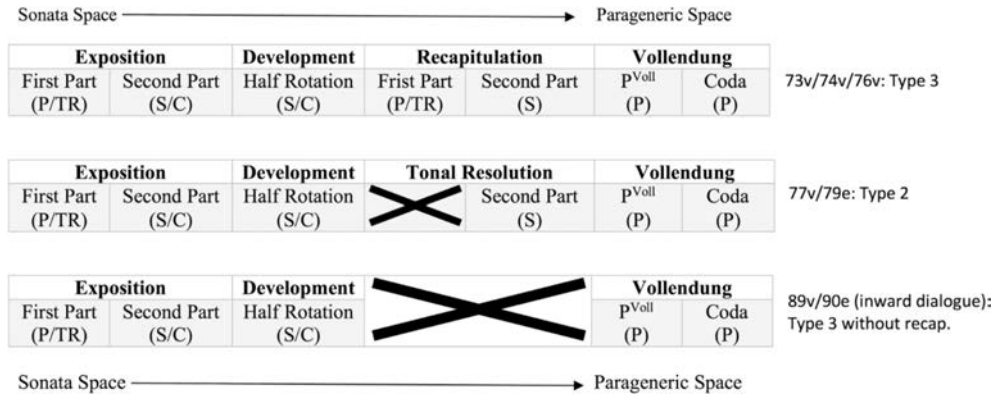
27 Hepokoski/Darcy 2006, p. 612.

28 On the Type-4 sonata, see *ibid.*, pp. 404–417.

29 In 73v there seem to be three potential interpretative choices: 1) the first stage of the *Vollendung* might be interpreted as the fifth part of a 5-part song form (A-B-A'-B'-A'') with a coda, and may thus be labeled >A^{Voll}<; 2) the *Vollendung*'s P-theme may be thought of as one instantiation of a Type-4 sonata's rondo refrain (P^{rf}); and 3) the P^{Voll} may be thought of as a >parageneric space< that does not fundamentally challenge the movement's Type-3 status. An interpretation along the lines of a 5-part song form seems unlikely, considering, for example, its weak accounting for the S-based developmental half-rotation (measures 89–128). This leaves interpretations 2 and 3 open. It seems to me that the latter interpretation is stronger given the absence of a restatement of the P-theme immediately after the exposition, and the movement's lack of rondo character.

30 On the Type 2 sonata, see Hepokoski/Darcy 2006, pp. 353–387. The Type-2 sonata, although rare by this time, is found in at least one other movement by Bruckner – the finale of the Seventh Symphony.

Tonal Resolution.³¹ As a result, in the inward dialogue of 89v and 90e, the end of the development connects directly to the *Vollendung*, completely bypassing the recapitulatory space and thus consummating a carefully scaffolded process of recapitulatory disintegration.

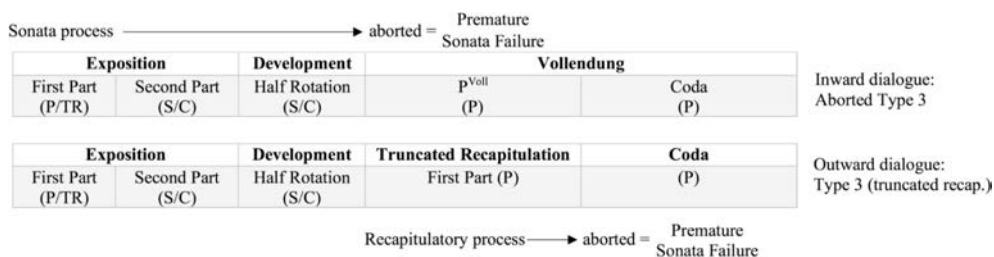


Example 5: Recapitulatory disintegration in A. Bruckner’s WAB 103/II

The Dialogical Play

Let us return to discussing the outward form of the movement’s last stage, and conclude this overview of WAB 103/II by considering, now from a two-dimensional dialogic perspective, the expressive outcome of the formal plans in 89v and 90e. As shown in Example 6, formal functionality in the movement’s last stage is contingent upon which dialogic dimension is in play. While the sonata-formal crisis in the outward dialogue takes shape only after the recapitulation begins, this crisis is triggered in the inward dialogue by suppressing the recapitulation altogether. Thus, although both dialogic dimensions produce a prematurely-failed sonata process, in the inward dialogue, the entire sonata (as opposed to only the recapitulation) is aborted. As a result, the choice of describing these movements in terms of their inward or outward dialogues has interpretative implications.

31 On Tonal Resolution, see Hepokoski/Darcy 2006, pp. 353–355 and 380.



Example 6: A. Bruckner's WAB 103/II (89v and 90e): inward and outward processes of sonata failure

It does not seem too far-fetched, then, to suppose that if a given listener is sufficiently aware of both sonata generic expectations and the movement's compositional history, his or her experience of 89v and 90e will subsume both dialogical dimensions. If so, the resulting two-dimensional dialogue would inhabit a conceptual space between the two kinds of dialogue, a point of interaction that I characterize as a ›region of dialogical play‹.³² This space of interpretative confluence is of special interest when the overlapping interpretations are not the same, thus yielding a compound, richer interpretation. In the case of 89v and 90e, the two intersecting interpretations – namely, truncated recapitulation and truncated sonata – reinforce a dramatic trajectory characterized by the exacerbation of sonata-failure conditions. As Hepokoski and Darcy explain, »the demonstration of ›sonata failure‹ became an increasingly attractive option in the hands of 19th-century composers who, for one reason or another, wished to suggest the inadequacy of the Enlightenment-grounded solutions provided by generic sonata practice.«³³ From a broader interpretative perspective, then, sonata failure is far from signifying a lack of strength or self-assurance, even though it is construed within the music's drama as the movement's inability to attain generic completion. Following this logic, in WAB 103/II, the connection between the exacerbation of sonata-failure conditions and compositional reworking takes on a larger significance for the assessment of Bruckner's oeuvre: since, as shown in this chapter, the gradually reinforced sonata-failure trajectory of WAB 103/II is contingent upon compositional reworking, we may as well

32 My use of the concept of a ›region of play‹ is an adaptation of that in Victor Kofi Agawu's semiotic theory of Classical music, in which it characterizes the zone of interaction between structural (harmonic) and expressive (topical) dimensions. Agawu (after Roman Jakobson) refers to these respectively as introversive and extroversive semiosis (see Agawu 1991, pp. 23–25 and 127–134). In my adaptation, these translate to inward and outward formal dialogues.

33 Hepokoski/Darcy 2006, p. 254.

take Bruckner's penchant for revision (often casted in a negative light as his ›weakness‹) and construe it as one of his foremost acts of self-determination.

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